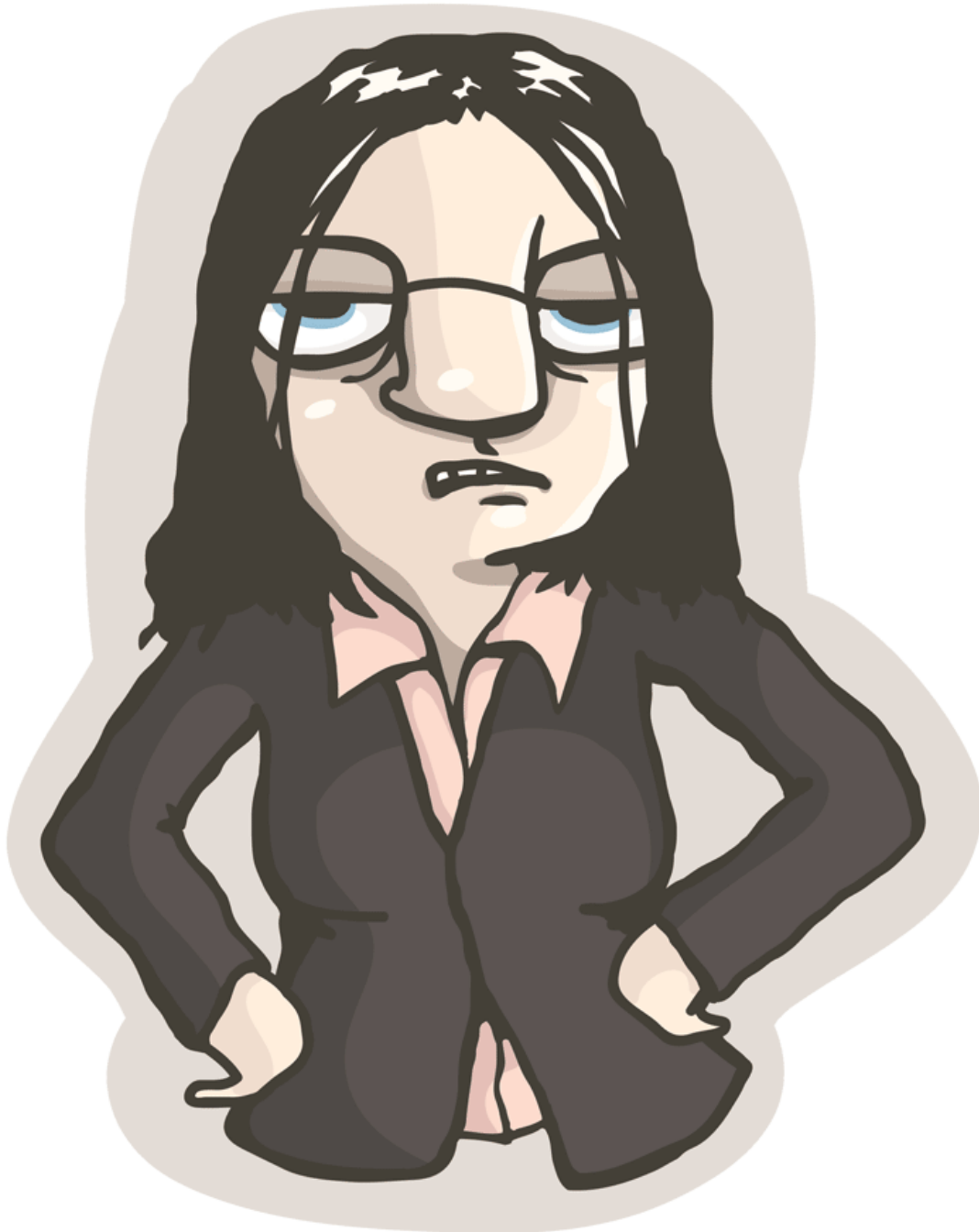


Are those jerks at work dragging you down?

May 13 2015, by Terry Kosdrosky



Sometimes co-workers can enliven your day and even inspire, while others...well, some can be downright soul-crushing.

According to new research at the University of Michigan, those jerks at work do more than make you feel bad—they drag down the job performance of people who interact with them.

"We were able to shed some light on the question of whether de-energizing relationships are just a hassle, or if they have deeper consequences," said Gretchen Spreitzer, professor of management and organizations at the U-M Ross School of Business. "Before, we've shown how enabling thriving at work and energizing relationships lead to better performance and business outcomes, and this looks at the opposite angle."

Spreitzer and colleagues performed two studies at two different companies using network analysis and surveys. In the first, they asked IT employees at an engineering firm to evaluate their relationships with each other. The researchers also looked at each employee's performance reviews, controlling for prior performance.

They found that the more a person had to interact with de-energizers, the lower their job [performance](#). In fact, it was associated with the lowest levels of [job performance](#).

The second study asked employees of a management consulting firm similar questions, and the researchers analyzed evaluations, but followed

up with an additional survey to measure how much employees felt they were thriving.

The results revealed that some people—those who felt they were thriving—fared better on their job evaluations despite exposure to de-energizers.

"Thriving mitigates the negative effects from negative people," Spreitzer said. "It shows that there are things people and organizations can do to buffer themselves when they have to deal with de-energizers."

Spreitzer suggests several steps that both employees and managers can take to prevent jerks from dragging others down.

Employees can:

- Limit interactions with de-energizers.
- Increase the time you spend with people who make you feel good.
- Make sure your work is meaningful.

Managers can:

- Set standards of appropriate behavior and enforce them. "Often these de-energizers are technically very good at what they do, so there's a tendency by management to indulge them," Spreitzer said.
- Consider behavior when promoting people. High performers in technical areas are often promoted regardless of their effect on other people.
- Give [employees](#) regular feedback and put a priority on training that involves work culture and professional behavior.

Spreitzer's research is the latest example of the bottom-line benefits of positive business practices.

"A lot of times people think that positive business is just about everyone being nice to each other," she said. "It's really about improving outcomes, and one way to do that is to reinforce your culture."

The findings will be published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

More information: "Destructive De-Energizing Relationships: How Thriving Buffers Their Effect on Performance." *J Appl Psychol*. 2015 Mar 23. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25798553

Provided by University of Michigan

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